

## **GISD expands pre-K program**

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GALVESTON — At home, Nadia Morales speaks only Spanish. At school, she rarely needs an English translation.

Even though the pre-kindergarten student's family speaks limited English, Morales is almost fluent at 5 years old and ready for kindergarten, said her teacher, Maria Rivas.

Pre-kindergarten students may be learning to read and write earlier, but they are also learning valuable social and behavioral skills that prepare them for kindergarten, Rivas said.

Galveston school district officials plan to expand pre-kindergarten enrollment next year in an effort to prepare more students for their “first year of school,” said Mary Patrick, director of special services.

In 2006-07, almost 400 students attended pre-kindergarten. District officials are hoping to enroll 450 for next year, including 136 Head Start students, the maximum possible because there are only enough federal funds to cover that many students. The district pays for pre-kindergarten students who aren't eligible for Head Start.

Pre-kindergarten was revamped at Galveston Independent School District in 2006-07 when the district initiated Head Start, in collaboration with Galveston County Community Action Council.

Head Start, which serves 3- and 4-year olds, is charged with putting economically disadvantaged children on an equal footing with their more privileged peers. The program is an attempt to meet the students' emotional, social, health, nutritional and psychological needs and make sure they are ready for school.

Galveston has taken the program a step further, enrolling 4-year-old students who are homeless, speak limited English, have a parent active in the military or a parent who has been killed or injured during active duty.

Through its partnership with Head Start, the district for the first time provided full-day pre-kindergarten for all students in 2006-07. Full-day programs give parents an alternative to babysitting and day-care services, while providing more time for instruction, Patrick said.

“They get a jump start on their education,” she said. “It increases the likelihood for success for all students.”

Studies show that children who enter school not prepared to learn because of academic, social or emotional deficiencies will continue to have problems later in life, according to a 2005 study called The Future of Children, published by the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, at Princeton University.

What happens to children early in life has a profound effect on their future achievement in school, the study states.

Patrick said a student who receives classroom instruction before kindergarten is less likely to fail and, subsequently, less likely to misbehave. In Rivas' classroom and other Galveston pre-kindergarten classrooms, the students learn thinking skills as well as social skills, such as how to follow rules and how to work as a team.

“It's a real boost for them,” Rivas said.

In 2007-08, Head Start will be once again located at Morgan Elementary School, and moved from Oppe Elementary School to Parker Elementary School. Pre-kindergarten registration will be held Tuesday through June 21 at the district's Annex, 3904 Ave. T.